DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 285 238 CS 505 686

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TITLE Public Speaking on the Streets and in the Ivory Tower: A Comparison of the Dale Carnegie Course and the Academic Course.
PUB DATE May 87
NOTE 23p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Eastern Communication Association (78th, Syracuse, NY, May 18-21, 1987).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS College Faculty; Communication Research; Comparative Analysis; *Course Content; Ethics; Higher Education; *Persuasive Discourse; *Public Speaking; Speech Curriculum; *Speech Instruction; Teacher Attitudes; Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS *Dale Carengie Course

ABSTRACT

Many speech communication educators and researchers look upon Dale Carnegie's public speaking course with derision for its methods as well as its motives. A comparison of Carnegie's course with university courses in speech communication reveals a number of differences between the two, which in part explains this attitude. Carnegie began his course to give practical instruction in the basics of public speaking to men whose jobs depended on facility in communication. He developed immediately useful, positive feedback methods of teaching public speaking, and his course came to symbolize the American pursuit of material success. Academics, however, have regarded Carnegie's method as little more than "animal-training tactics," and complain (1) that students are not given realistic assessment of their speaking skills; (2) that his "hard sell" approach to marketing his course has often been fraudulent; and (3) that his motives are unethical because they involve selling a course that is designed to make money and increase the students' earning potentials, mostly by giving them a predatory advantage over their audience. Finally, the biggest difference is that Carnegie offers training, while the university offers an education based on research and theory. However, while most of Carnegie's methods would be inappropriate for the university classroom, academics would be wise to maintain an awareness of his organization and others like it, and glean whatever useful information possible from them, rather than prejudicially rejecting them. (Eleven references are included.) (JC)

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PUBLIC SPEAKING ON THE STREETS AND IN THE IVORY TOWER: A COMPARISON OF THE DALE CARNEGIE COURSE AND THE ACADEMIC COURSE

by

Christine M. Miller

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Department of Speech Communication

The Pennsylvania State University

Eastern Communication Association Convention

May 1987

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Public Speaking on the Streets and in the Ivory Tower:
A Comparison of the Dale Carnegie and the Academic Course

There is an attitude among a large number of professionals in the University setting that Dale Carnegie and his franchise of courses on speaking effectively are to be looked upon with derision. I have often observed that the mere mention of Dale Carnegie's name in relation to the teaching of public speaking results in knowing smiles and sneers from professors, instructors, and many students of Speech Communication. The man and the course he founded are clearly denigrated by many of those associated with the discipline of Speech Communication; but rarely have I observed any of those who deride the Dale Carnegie system to provide any rationale for their attitude. The attitude exists, to be sure. What is not plainly evident, though, is <u>why</u> it exists. Why would speech professionals in universities, who clearly wish to foster the skills of effective speaking, actively scorn an attempt to bring such skills within the reach of many individuals who would not otherwise have the opportunity to attain them? The answer to this question is not easy. But it is the thesis of this paper that a comparison of Dale Carnegie's methods with those used in the academic setting will bring us

closer to a satisfactory response. Therefore, I shall explore the background and impact of the Carnegie course, compare its philosophy and methods with the basic university course, and draw some conclusions about the results of the comparison. The juxtaposition of each course in relation to the other shall provide insight into the evolution and development of both.

Background

Dale Carnegie began teaching his first public speaking course in 1912 for the YMCA in New York City. He perceived a need for practical instruction in the basics of public speaking directed at men whose jobs demanded facility in communication. Prior to the development of his course, the most prevalent type of training in public speaking available was elocution. In fact, Carnegie recounted with disfavor his own unsatisfactory encounter with this type of speech training:

> I shall never forget my first lesson in speaking. I was taught to let my arm hang loosely at my side, with the palm turned to the rear, fingers half-closed and thumb touching my leg. I was drilled to bring the arm up in a picturesque curve, to give the wrist a classical turn, and then to unflod the forefinger first, the second finger next, and the little finger last. When the whole aesthetic and ornamental movement had been executed, the arm was to retrace the course of the curve and rest again by the side

of the leg. The whole performance was wooden and affected. There was nothing sensible or honest about it.

My instructor made no attempt to get me to put my own individuality into my speaking; no attempt to have me speak like a normal, living human being conversing in an energetic manner with my audience (59-60).

Carnegie saw the need to break free of the bonds of elocution, to abandon the "ornate 'oratory of "orators"'--a thing that is as useless as a squirrel-headed tire pump, as out-of-date as a quill pen" (200). He sought a new approach to public communication, "one that would be streamlined, and one that would reflect our age's need for a psychological as well as a logical method for influencing the listener to act" (121-122). He was not alone in viewing the elocutionary movement with scorn; in the early 1900's a new view of public speaking emerged, and Dale Carnegie was on the cutting edge of this perspective. Boorstin claims that "[t]he shift in focus was dramatic: from the models and standards of 'eloquence' and 'oratory' to the person and his problems, from 'elocution' and 'declamation' to self-improvement and personal success. The popular symbol of this new view of the public word was Dale Carnegie. While he was ignored by academic teachers of rhetoric (his name does not appear in the ponderous academic histories of 'speech education' in America), his books had a spectacular popular success and his name became a household word" (467).

The "Dale Carnegie Course in Effective Speaking and Human Relations" was thus aimed at salesmen, executives, etc., whose livelihood depended upon persuading others not through the stilted mechanics of elocution, but by simple, straightforward principles of human relations. It is interesting to note, as Boorstin does, that "[w]hen a prominent person or high executive enrolled in the early days of the Carnegie courses, it was often under an assumed name. But by the 1950's the Carnegie courses had the public confidence of American men of affairs" (469). These courses became so popular, in fact, that since 1912 tens of thousands of men as well as women have enrolled in them each year (Swartz 1).

To meet the growing demand, Carnegie expanded his system by training instructors and franchising the right to use his methods and resources. Now his course is taught all over the United States and abroad. Many companies subsidize their employees to take the course, while others sign up on their own at a cost of $575 (Swartz 1). This cost includes both instruction and resource materials, including Carnegie's own textbook, Public Speaking and Influencing Men in Business. According to Carnegie's wife, Dorothy, this text "went through more than fifty printings, was translated into eleven languages, and was revised by Dale Carnegie several times to keep pace with his own increased knowledge and experience. More people used the book each year than the combined enrollments of the largest universities. This fourth

revision of the book has been based upon my husband's own notes and ideas" (x).

The growth and development of Dale Carnegie's course in Effective Speaking and Human Relations is astounding. Its significance justifies, indeed, calls for, analysis by scholars in academia. Not only has Carnegie's course filled a perceived need outside of the realm of the university setting, but it has done so with enormous success. Given that universities pride themselves on appealing to any segment of the population which desires instruction by trained professionals (aside from certain vocational fields), why is it that they have not been able to attract the type of market to which Carnegie appeals? In order to understand exactly what is so "different" about Carnegie's course which attracts this specialized market, the next section shall analyze Carnegie's philosophy, his teaching methods, and the differences between Carnegie and university courses.

Comparison

The Carnegie philosophy on the teaching of public speaking is relatively simple: use the resources and potential of the student to motivate him or her to learn. Motivation is key in the Carnegie system. If the student does not have a driving desire to succeed as a speaker, then no amount of instruction will work. Carnegie's appeal is to adults who sincerely want to learn how to master the skills of public speaking

and human relations within the context of their own individual lives. Dorothy Carnegie summarized her husband's philosophy in this way: "Dale approached public speaking not as a fine art requiring special talents and aptitude, but as a skill which any normally intelligent person could acquire and develop at will" (ix). The development of this skill is dependent upon motivation, in Carnegie's conceptualization. He constantly advises readers of his textbook to marshall the right frame of mind for success, and the rest will follow with little effort. The first page of his text sets the tone of his approach: "As adults, we are interested in a quick and easy way to speak effectively. The only way we can achieve results quickly is to have the right attitude about achieving our goal and a firm foundation of principles to build upon." Later on in the text, he explicitly states that "the will to succeed must be a vital part of the process of becoming an effective speaker" (18).

Once he persuades his readers to adopt the correct attitude about their goals, he then lays down the groundwork of concepts which he feels are central to success in most speaking situations. At that point, he expects the students to maximize their potential by putting his principles into play at every available opportunity, both in and out of the context of the class. As Swartz explains, "[i]nternalization and permanence of change also figure in the instructional philosophy. While in many instructional situations the students think of the subject matter only when in class or actually preparing assignments, the

Carnegie instruction forces the students to 'live' the course throughout the week" (48). Thus, the students are expected to operationalize the Dewey concept of learning by doing (Swartz 122).

They are provided with the "nuts and bolts" of the Carnegie method in weekly meetings which last 3 1/2 hours. These meetings take place for fourteen weeks, and cover such topics as "developing self confidence (sic), stagefright, memory training, goal setting, bodily action and visual aids, impromptu speaking, introducing a speaker, informative and persuasive speaking, developing and supporting a message, speech organization, interpersonal relationships, listening skills, developing enthusiasm, leadership, effective participation in meetings and discussions, and combatting worry" (Swartz 44).

These topics are not introduced using a lecture format; in fact, there are no lectures or examinations. Speaking and reading assignments are explained at least a week in advance, but it is not expected that the speaker will draft and memorize some sort of declamation. Emphasis is on extemporaneous delivery and the ability to "think on one's feet." Swartz details a number of other specific procedures followed in the course: "Classes begin promptly and a strict time schedule is followed. In Part A, speeches are usually 60 seconds long, with a bell ringing at the end of that time and the speaker must stop immediately. No written outlines are required and no speaking notes are permitted. Every speech receives applause. Ballots are distributed to all class members for voting for the personal progress and achievement awards. Those prizes

are pens or books, and the recipient goes to the front of the room to accept the award. A wall chart is maintained showing award recipients for each session" (44-45).

Positive reinforcement, as a reward for internal motivation and success (or at the very least, attempts) in public speaking, is also a staple of the Carnegie system. The emphasis is clearly on positive, as opposed to negative, feedback. As Swartz's study explains, "[b]ecause positive thinking and a favorable self-concept are essential to overcoming fear, affirmative reinforcement is a conspicuous tenet in Carnegie's instructional philosophy. For this reason, comments on students' speeches are always positive and encouraging" (48). Each student speech, therefore, receives immediate oral praise from the instructor. If a student is unable to complete a speech, the instructor will offer help and support, since "[n]o speaker is permitted to sit down without having been assured that something worthwhile has been accomplished, or that progress is being made in some specific area, such as eye contact or topic choice" (Swartz 46-47). The atmosphere of the course is overwhelmingly encouraging, reassuring and inspiring.

One of the key ways in which Carnegie is able to communicate this atmosphere to the students is through his textbook. It is an unusual text, in the sense that its approach and style mirror the colloquial manner of its author's sage advice, rather than taking on the characteristics of a standard academic textbook. Carnegie claims early in his book that it "is not an ordinary textbook. It is not filled with

rules concerning the mechanics of speaking. It does not dwell on the physiological aspects of vocal production and articulation. It is the distillation of a lifetime spent in training adults in effective speaking. It starts with you as you are, and from that premise works naturally to the conclusion of what you want to be. All you have to do is co-operate--follow the suggestions in this book, apply them in every speaking situation, and persevere" (5).

Such statements permeate the book, reinforcing the basic philosophy of the man and the course, and inviting the reader to answer the challenge which will lead to success in all facets of life. Boorstin points out that "[w]hile Dale Carnegie's work showed no literary distinction, it was written in the plain style and had the virtues of the most effective advertising copy. Brilliant in its psychological insights and in its practicality, it long remained the most successful adaptation of the moralistic tradition of self-improvement to the special circumstances of twentieth-century America" (468).

Part of the success of the text, as Boorstin explains, is the appeal of its plain style. Carnegie demonstrated his facility with the techniques of persuasion by using one tactic in particular throughout the book: he was quite adept at helping the audience visualize his plan of action in operation. In essence, he created virtual experience in his readers by helping them conceptualize his suggestions <u>as if</u> they had already been put into play. Here are some examples of this technique:

> Think of the satisfaction and pleasure that will be yours when you stand up and confidently share your thoughts and feelings with your audience (13). Begin now to picture yourself before an audience you might be called upon to address. See yourself stepping forward with confidence, listen to the hush fall upon the room as you begin, feel the attentive absorption of the audience as you drive home point after point, feel the warmth of the applause as you leave the platform, and hear the words of appreciation with which individual members of the audience greet you when the meeting is over. Believe me, there is a magic in it and a never-to-be-forgotten thrill (13-14). If you put enthusiasm into learning how to speak more effectively you will find that the obstacles in your path will disappear. This is a challenge to focus all your talent and power on the goal of effective communication with your fellow men. Think of the self-reliance, the assurance, the poise that will be yours, the sense of mastery that comes from being able to hold the attention, stir the emotions, and convince a group to act. You will find that competence in self-expression will lead to competence in other ways as well, for training in effective speaking is the royal road to self-confidence in all the areas of working and living (268-269).

All in all, Dale Carnegie's format, teaching methods, style of critique, and textbook make his course a unique learning experience. Swartz

succintly summed up the pedagogical approach by saying, "The method certainly is a departure from the traditional" (23).

By now the major contrasts between the Carnegie course and the standard university basic speaking course are probably self-evident: academic courses have lectures and examinations, emphasize research, documentation and speech preparation, and employ grading. Carnegie courses do none of these things.

There are other distinctions as well. When the philosophies and missions of each institution are compared, the differences between the Carnegie system and the university approach are magnified. For instance, there is a fundamental difference between theory and pragmatism which surfaces between the two. The educational philosophy at Dale Carnegie is pragmatic, based on practical techniques which can be used in a variety of situations and in common dealings with people. The university teaching philosophy is more theoretical; instructors often focus on communication theory and speech content (language, style, etc.) in order to ground the instruction in academia.

A related difference between the two has to do with the fundamental difference between education and training: "The goal of the Carnegie course is personal improvement; the goal of a college basic course is to contribute to the student's liberal arts background. In other words, the former is training and the latter is education" (Swartz 119-120). Millson's analysis agrees with this position, to the extent that "Dale Carnegie courses are not academic courses in speech; his methods cannot

be taught as such; nor, in the main, can they be transferred to the academic class; as such, many of his procedures and concepts do not conform to the function of a curriculum in a college of liberal arts" (72).

Millson's statement alludes to the most fundamental difference between the Carnegie class and the academic subject taught in universities: Carnegie's emphasis is on meeting the special needs of his students. The university is less concerned with meeting student needs and more concerned with providing an <u>education</u>. Swartz elucidates: "Compared to traditional and academic public speaking courses, this one shifted emphasis from subject matter to satisfaction of class members' emotional and attitudinal needs. This non-academic, non-theoretical basis was a revolutionary approach to the subject matter of public speaking and laid the foundation for all future Carnegie training. Though it began as a public speaking course, emphasis gradually shifted to the development of better human relations" (14).

This is not to say that universities do not attend to their student's needs; on the contrary, as schools compete with each other to attract students, one of the areas in which they place great emphasis is satisfying students' emotional and attitudinal needs. But these schools refuse to compromise their main mission: to provide an education. This mission, by design, emphasizes theoretical matters in relation to broadening the student's mind and encouraging him or her to think. These same principles apply to classes in speech. Millson argues that

"Academic courses may be able to adopt the Carnegie concept of a larger emphasis on emotional adjustment of students, by more positive emphasis in criticism, by different selection of speaking talks, exercises and assignments, and by the use of more devices to stimulate actual practice in speaking outside the classroom. . . . However, in such adaptation to undergraduate classes, we must be careful that there be no actual academic loss, or severe dislocation of present teaching, or loss of departmental prestige within the college or university, if we are to preserve the values created with such difficulty within the last twenty years" (72). Thus, even though there has been a shift toward catering to student needs in university instruction, this shift has occurred within the constraints of the educational values which comprise the school's mission.

Aside from the fairly philosophical differences between the two already discussed, there is a final difference which deserves mention: each aims to attract a different clientele. While the Dale Carnegie course targets "a heterogeneous adult group motivated by a desire for better communication and human relations skills" (Swartz 120), universities tend to attract a homogeneous adolescent group driven toward attaining "a degree", regardless of subject matter. It makes sense, given the different markets being appealed to, that methods which are successful with one group may not translate to the other. Carnegie encountered this problem himself when he first began his communication seminars: "When I started to teach at the 125th Street YMCA . . . I

taught those first classes pretty much the way I had been taught in my college years in Warrensburg, Missouri. But I soon discovered that I was on the wrong track; I was trying to teach adults in the business world as though they were college freshmen" (6). He found, therefore, that university teaching techniques are not very appropriate for teaching business professionals. Millson claims, conversely, that it is unrealistic to expect the techniques used in the Carnegie class to be successful with college freshmen: ". . . [I]t did not seem probable that we might be able to transfer to the university classroom of underdeveloped undergraduates the concepts and methods which are effective in teaching adults of higher age level. . . . [I]t is obvious that successful teaching with different types of students, at different levels of maturity and function, and with such difference in intensity of movitation, does not necessarily imply that the same methods would be successful with undergraduates; it does imply that this type of teaching might have value for the graduates of the university or college, once they have decided upon their vocational field" (67-68). All in all, then, it seems reasonable to conclude that "the Dale Carnegie Course and the basic college course are not interchangeable or even competition (sic) for the same market" (Swartz 124).

This comparison between the teaching philosophies, methods and missions of the two programs suggests that there are more differences than similarities. The next question to ask is what these contrasting

qualities mean, especially in relation to the Speech Communication discipline.

Results

Dale Carnegie and his system of instruction have met with some criticism throughout the years. The charges leveled against the man and the method vary, but four prevalent criticism are as follows:

(1) The Carnegie method "amounts to animal-training tactics" (Hubert 102) which stress behavior modification over legitimate educational techniques. As such, the student is to be manipulated and taught skills much like animals are taught to jump through hoops.

(2) Carnegie's students are not presented with a realistic assessment of their mastery of the skills taught. As Boyd explains, ". . . some students late in the course expressed dissatisfaction concerning the lack of specific instruction on ways to improve. Receiving only positive feedback, the student may not really see himself as others see him" (380). Analysts who offered this opinion argued that constructive negative criticism can be just as valuable (perhaps more so) as exclusively positive feedback. The absence of negative criticism can skew the student's perspective, and thus do more harm than good.

(3) Dale Carnegie's attempts to "sell" his course in Effective Speaking and Human Relations caused some critics to lambast his approach. His "hard sell" tactics particularly infuriated many people in the Speech Communication field, who charged that these tactics were

unethical. For example, one of Carnegie's campaigns to "sell" his course centered around a testimonial by what the reader would likely assume was a satisfied customer. Carnegie distributed this testimonial through magazines and pamphlets. He tried to broaden the market for this testimonial by appealing to editors of magazines and journals to reprint the story. James M. O'Neill, editor of the Quarterly Journal of Speech, was one of those to which Carnegie appealed. O'Neill investigated Carnegie's claims about the testimonial and felt compelled to unmask what he implicitly perceived as a sham: "Mr. Carnagey wrote in January that the article mentioned is a story of the experiences of a number of his students; . . . Mr. Carnagey, knowing that the Editor of The Quarterly had this information, still went on to suggest a reprinting of the article in The Quarterly and wrote the Editor that in commenting on it he (the editor) could say that it is a true story, because it is a group of true stories. The apparent assumption that the Editor of The Quarterly would be willing to reprint this article and tell the readers that it was a true story, knowing the actual facts of the case was not very pleasing or complimentary. Under the circumstances, we feel not only justified, but 'called upon' to publish the whole story" (137). It may not be going too far afield to suggest that O'Neill wanted to censure Carnegie and present him and his course as a fraud.

(4) Perhaps the most significant criticism of the Dale Carnegie system is that it is designed for profit. The criticism here is on two

levels: first, the course itself is an attempt to make money; second, the students are, in effect, trained so as to increase their earning potential.

As to the first level, Boorstin points out that "[i]n a nation with a Go-Getting tradition, Dale Carnegie became the Go-Getter's Go-Getter. He achieved fame and fortune by selling salesmanship" (469). In effect, Carnegie epitomizes the speak-for-profit philosophy of the classical Greek sophists. Sophistry, particularly in the Speech Communication field, is generally disparaged as predatory and "unprofessional." Thus, the very fact that Carnegie "sells" his instruction outside of the context of academia is cause for censure.

The second level of criticism relates to the <u>results</u> of the instruction. Once his students learn the proper skills, they use these skills for further profit. Huber comments that "[t]hough the list of things the course can do for you has increased over the years, they all, in one way or another, add up to achieving material success. The customers are satisfied" (247).

The natural extension of this criticism is the charge that Carnegie graduates learn how to take advantage of people, "to have a superior predatory advantage in society" (Williamson 376). It is understandable that such a criticism would be quite prevalent among university instructors, since its ethical implications provide a mandate for university instruction. In other words, the university and its mission become even more important in the face of unethical practices.

Williamson puts this point of view in perspective when he states, "[a]ny education which would seem to have as its slogan 'Training in techniques which will prevent a sucker from getting a break,' or 'Training in techniques of friendliness that will enable you to get the better of the other fellow,' simply falls without the pale of true education. It represents the lowest standards of our society and cannot but be condemned. That kind of instruction which would equip public speakers to take advantage of their fellows has no place in the legitimate educational institution, and teachers who engage in it should without mercy be weeded out with the liar and the cheat" (376). True education, in contrast to sophistic and predatory skill instruction, is to be lauded for its contributions to the functioning of an ethical society, in Williamson's conceptualization.

Williamson is not alone in his thinking, particularly among university professors instructing in the early 1900's. With the birth of the field of Speech came a concerted attempt to legitimize it as a distinct discipline in the academy. It is natural that Carnegie and his course would be denigrated and considered a threat to the advancement of the discipline. It is also reasonable to expect that this attitude would be passed along to new generations of speech instructors, who would share the devotion to the purity of education versus training, to theory versus pragmatism, to learning versus sophistry. Given the contrasting goals and missions of the two, it is not surprising that I

have observed knowing smiles and sneers from speech educators, and that the Dale Carnegie system has been scorned.

Still, as a result of conducting this investigation, I believe that the Carnegie course in Effective Speaking and Human Relations should not be dismissed out of hand by the academy. I agree with Swartz's claim that "[i]t would behoove university departments to be at least aware of what is going on in outside organizations like Dale Carnegie" (3). If the discipline maintains a solipsistic view of its goals and aims, without considering what other approaches have to offer, it risks the rejection of some potentially useful information. Millson argues that ". . . we should be familiar with the Carnegie methods, and test by trial any that are new before rejecting them through prejudice against commercialization, which we all condemn" (73). Since academia is the bastion of the search for Truth, the Speech Communication field ought not act according to its prejudices for fear that such enmity will blind it to the recognition of any semblance of Truth. I believe this field should consider any reasonable methods of speech instruction without letting myopic predispositions stand in its way.

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